

# Mexico

## Country Specific Information



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[Travel Warning for Mexico](#)



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**COUNTRY DESCRIPTION:** Mexico is a Spanish-speaking country about three times the size of Texas, consisting of 31 states and one federal district. The capital is Mexico City. Mexico has a rapidly developing economy, ranked by the International Monetary Fund as the fourteenth largest in the world. The climate ranges from tropical to arid, and the terrain consists of coastal lowlands, central high plateaus, deserts and mountains of up to 18,000 feet.

Many cities throughout Mexico are popular tourist destinations for U.S. citizens. Travelers should note that location-specific information contained below is not confined solely to those cities, but can reflect conditions throughout Mexico. Although the majority of visitors to Mexico thoroughly enjoy their stay, a small number experience difficulties and serious inconveniences.

Please read the [State Department's Background Notes on Mexico](#) and the Mexico [Travel Warning](#) for additional information.

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### SMART TRAVELER ENROLLMENT PROGRAM (STEP)/EMBASSY, CONSULATE & CONSULAR

**AGENCY LOCATIONS:** U.S. citizens living or traveling in Mexico are encouraged to [sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) in order to obtain updated information on local travel and security. U.S. citizens without Internet access may sign up directly with the nearest U.S.

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embassy or consulate. Enrolling is important; it allows the State Department to assist U.S. citizens in an emergency and keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements.

**Embassy Location:** The U.S. Embassy is located in Mexico City at Paseo de la Reforma 305, Colonia Cuauhtemoc; telephone from the United States: 011-52-55-5080-2000; telephone within Mexico City: 5080-2000; telephone long distance within Mexico 01-55-5080-2000. You may contact the Embassy by [e-mail](#) or visit the [Embassy website](#). The U.S. Embassy in Mexico City is also on [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#).

The Embassy serves a consular district encompassing the Federal District of Mexico; the states of Guanajuato, Queretaro, Hidalgo, Veracruz, Michoacan, the State of Mexico, Tlaxcala, Morelos, Puebla, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Tabasco, and Chiapas; and the city of Tampico, Tamaulipas. In addition to the Embassy there are nine United States consulates and thirteen consular agencies located throughout Mexico. In the list below you will find the consular district covered by each consulate.

**CONSULATES (with consular districts defined by Mexican state):**

**Ciudad Juarez** (Chihuahua): Paseo de la Victoria 3650, telephone (011) (52) (656) 227-3000. [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

**Guadalajara** (Nayarit, Jalisco, Aguas Calientes, and Colima): Progreso 175, Col. Americana; telephone (011) (52) (333) 268-2100. [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

**Hermosillo** (Sinaloa and the southern part of Sonora): Calle Monterrey 141 Poniente, Col. Esqueda; telephone (011) (52) (662) 289-3500. [Facebook](#)

**Matamoros** (the southern part of Tamaulipas with the exception of the city of Tampico): Avenida Primera 2002 y Azaleas; telephone (011) (52) (868) 812-4402. [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

**Merida** (Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo): Calle 60 No. 338 K x 29 y 31, Col. Alcala Martin; telephone (011) (52) (999) 942-5700.

**Monterrey** (Nuevo Leon, Durango, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosi, and the southern part of Coahuila): Avenida Constitucion 411 Poniente; telephone (011) (52) (818) 047-3100. [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

**Nogales** (the northern part of Sonora): Calle San Jose, Fraccionamiento "Los Alamos"; telephone (011) (52) (631) 311-8150. [Facebook](#)

**Nuevo Laredo** (the northern part of Coahuila and the northwestern part of Tamaulipas): Calle Allende 3330, Col. Jardin; telephone (011) (52) (867) 714-0512.

**Tijuana** (Baja California Norte and Baja California Sur): Paseo de Las Culturas s/n Mesa de Otay, telephone (011) (52) (664) 977-2000. [Facebook](#)

**CONSULAR AGENCIES (mainly serving the location city only):**

**Acapulco:** Hotel Emporio, Costera Miguel Aleman 121 – Suite 14; telephone (011)(52)(744) 481-0100 or (011)(52)(744) 484-0300.

**Los Cabos:** Tiendas de Palmilla, Carretera Transpeninsular Km 27.5  
Local B221, San José del Cabo, Baja California Sur, C.P. 23406: Telephone: (624) 143-3566  
Fax: (624) 143-6750

**Cancun:** Blvd. Kukulcan Km 13 ZH Torre La Europea, Despacho 301 Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico C.P. 77500; telephone (011)(52)(998) 883-0272. [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

**Cozumel:** Plaza Villa Mar en El Centro, Plaza Principal, (Parque Juárez between Melgar and 5th Ave.) 2nd floor, Locales #8 and 9; telephone (011)(52)(987) 872-4574.

**Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo:** Hotel Fontan, Blvd. Ixtapa; telephone (011)(52)(755) 553-2100.

**Mazatlan:** Hotel Playa Mazatlán, Playa Gaviotas 202, Zona Dorada; telephone (011)(52)(669) 916-5889.

**Oaxaca:** Macedonio Alcalá No. 407, Interior 20; telephone (011)(52)(951)514-3054 or (011)(52)(951) 516-2853.

**Piedras Negras:** Abasolo 211, Local 3, Col. Centro; telephone (011)(52)(878) 782-5586 or (011)(52)(878) 782-8664.

**Playa del Carmen:** The Palapa, Calle 1 Sur, between Avenida 15 and Avenida 20; telephone (011)(52)(984) 873-0303.

**Puerto Vallarta :**Paseo de Los Cocoteros 85 Sur, Paradise Plaza – Local L-7, Nuevo Vallarta, Nayarit C.P.; telephone (011)(52)(322) 222-0069.

**Reynosa:** Calle Emilio Portes Gil #703, Col. Prado Sur; telephone: (011)(52) (899)-921-6530

**San Luis Potosi:** Edificio "Las Terrazas", Avenida Venustiano Carranza 2076-41, Col. Polanco; telephone (011)(52)(444) 811-7802 or (011)(52)(444) 811-7803.

**San Miguel de Allende:** Centro Comercial La Luciernaga, Libramiento Manuel Zavala (Pepe KBZON), telephone (011)(52)(415) 152-2357.

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**ENTRY /EXIT REQUIREMENTS:** For the latest entry requirements, visit [the National Institute of Migration's website](#), [the Secretary of Tourism's Manual on tourist entry](#), or contact the [Embassy of Mexico](#) at 1911 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20006, telephone (202) 736-1600, or any Mexican consulate in the United States.

Since March 1, 2010, all U.S. citizens – including children – have been required to present a valid passport or passport card for travel into Mexico. While documents are not routinely checked along the land border, Mexican authorities at immigration checkpoints approximately 20 to 30 kilometers from the border with the U.S. will often conduct vehicle and document inspections and will require valid travel documents and an entry permit or Forma Migratoria Multiple (FMM). All U.S. citizens entering by land and traveling farther than 20 kilometers into Mexico should stop at an immigration checkpoint to obtain an FMM, even if not explicitly directed to do so by Mexican officials. Beyond the 20-30 kilometer border zone, all non-Mexican citizens must have valid immigration documents (FMM, FM2, FM3 or FME) regardless of the original place of entry. Failure to present an FMM when checking in for an international flight departing Mexico can result in delays or missed flights as airlines may insist that a valid FMM be obtained from Mexican immigration authorities (Instituto Nacional de Migración, INM) before issuing a boarding pass.

All U.S. citizens entering Mexico by sea, including U.S. citizens engaged in recreational or commercial fishing in Mexican territorial waters, are required to have an FMM. Additionally, boats engaged in commercial activities in Mexican waters, including sports fishing vessels, must be inspected and permitted by the Secretariat of Communications and Transportations (SCT), which publishes Spanish-language information on [Mexican boating permit requirements](#). All U.S. citizens aged 16 or older must present a valid U.S. passport book to return to the United States via an international flight. All U.S. citizens aged 16 or older

traveling outside of the United States by air, land or sea (except closed-loop cruises) are required to present a [Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative](#) (WHTI) [compliant document](#) such as a passport book or a passport card to return to the United States. Travelers with passports that are found to be washed, mutilated or damaged may be refused entry to Mexico and returned to the United States. We strongly encourage all U.S. citizen travelers to apply for a U.S. passport well in advance of anticipated travel. U.S. citizens can visit the Bureau of Consular Affairs' website or call 1-877-4USA-PPT (1-877-487-2778) for [information on how to apply for their passports](#).

While WHTI compliant documents other than passport books are sufficient for re-entry into the United States by land or sea, they may not be accepted as entry documents by the particular country you plan to visit; please be sure to check with your cruise line and countries of destination for any foreign entry requirements.

Although Mexican Immigration regulations allow use of the passport card for entry into Mexico by air, travelers should be aware that the card may not be used to board international flights in the U.S. or to return to the U.S. from abroad by air. The passport card is available only to U.S. citizens. Further [information on the Passport Card](#) can be found on our website.

Legal permanent residents in possession of their I-551 Permanent Resident card may board flights to the United States from Mexico.

**HIV/AIDS Restrictions:** The U.S. Department of State is unaware of any HIV/AIDS entry restrictions for visitors to or foreign residents of Mexico.

**Minors:** Mexican law requires that any non-Mexican citizen under the age of 18 departing Mexico must carry notarized written permission from any parent or guardian not traveling with the child to or from Mexico. This permission must include the name of the parent, the name of the child, the name of anyone traveling with the child, and the notarized signature(s) of the absent parent(s). The State Department recommends that the permission should include travel dates, destinations, airlines and a brief summary of the circumstances surrounding the travel. The child must be carrying the original letter – not a facsimile or scanned copy – as well as proof of the parent/child relationship (usually a birth certificate or court document) – and an original custody decree, if applicable. Travelers should contact the [Mexican Embassy](#) or the nearest Mexican consulate for current information.

**Tourist Travel:** U.S. citizens do not require a visa or a tourist card for tourist stays of 72 hours or less within the 20-30 kilometer "border zone". U.S. citizens traveling as tourists beyond the "border zone", or entering Mexico by air, must pay a fee to obtain a tourist card, also known as an FMM, available from Mexican consulates, Mexican border crossing points, Mexican tourism offices, airports within the border zone and most airlines serving Mexico. The fee for the tourist card is generally included in the price of a plane ticket for travelers arriving by air. U.S. citizens fill out the FMM form; Mexican immigration retains the large portion and the traveler is given the small right-hand portion. This FMM is normally white, blue and green in color. It is extremely important to keep this form in a safe location. Mexican immigration agents and federal police have the authority to ask for proof of legal status in Mexico, and on occasion,

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U.S. citizens without documents have been detained by police. Travelers should always carry a photocopy of their passport data page and FMM. Upon exiting the country at a Mexican Immigration (INM) departure check point, U.S. citizens are required to turn in this form. We are aware of cases where U.S. citizens without their FMM have been required to change their flight (at personal expense), file a police report regarding the missing document, and visit an INM office to pay a fine and obtain a valid exit visa. In other cases, travelers have been able to continue their journey after paying a fine. For more information visit the [INM website](#).

**Business Travel:** Upon arrival in Mexico, business travelers must complete and submit form FMM authorizing the conduct of business, but not employment, for a 30-day period. Travelers entering Mexico for purposes other than tourism or business, or for stays of longer than 180 days, require a visa and must carry a valid U.S. passport. U.S. citizens planning to work or live in Mexico should apply for the appropriate Mexican visa at the Mexican Embassy in Washington, DC, or at the nearest Mexican consulate in the United States.

**Vehicle Permits:** Tourists wishing to travel beyond the border zone with their vehicle must obtain a temporary import permit or risk having their vehicle confiscated by Mexican customs officials. At present the only exceptions to the requirement are for vehicles traveling in the Baja Peninsula and those vehicles covered by the "Only Sonora" program in Western Sonora. This program generally covers the area west of Mexican Federal Highway 15 between the Arizona border and the Gulf of California, ending in Empalme. Foreign vehicles entering Mexico through land border crossings in Sonora do not need temporary import permits if they remain within the zone established by the program. All foreign tourists, however, must have their valid immigration documents (FMM, FM2, FM3 or FME) with them at all times while traveling through Mexico regardless of whether or not they must register their vehicles. For details on the program, visit the " [Only Sonora](#) " website (Spanish only).

To acquire a permit, one must submit evidence of citizenship, title for the vehicle, a vehicle registration certificate, a driver's license, and a processing fee to either a Banjercito (Mexican Army Bank) branch located at a Mexican Customs (Aduana) office at the port of entry, or at one of the Mexican consulates located in the United States. Mexican law also requires the posting of a bond at a Banjercito office to guarantee the export of the car from Mexico within a time period determined at the time of the application. For this purpose, American Express, Visa or MasterCard credit card holders will be asked to provide credit card information; others will need to make a cash deposit of between \$200 and \$400, depending on the make/model/year of the vehicle. In order to recover this bond or avoid credit card charges, travelers must go to any Mexican Customs office immediately prior to departing Mexico. Regardless of any official or unofficial advice to the contrary, vehicle permits cannot be obtained at checkpoints in the interior of Mexico. If the proper permit is not obtained before entering Mexico and cannot be obtained at the Banjercito branch at the port of entry, do not proceed to the interior. Travelers without the proper permit may be incarcerated, fined and/or have their vehicle seized at immigration/customs checkpoints. In addition, in November 2011, Mexico implemented a [requirement for emissions certification](#) for vehicles being permanently imported to Mexico. There are [restrictions](#) on the age of vehicles being permanently imported, but there are no such restrictions for cars under temporary permits. For further information, visit the [website for Mexican Customs](#) (Aduanas) at [Acerca de Aduana Mexico](#) ("About Mexican Customs").

Travelers should avoid individuals who wait outside vehicle permit offices and offer to obtain the permits without waiting in line, even if they appear to be government officials. There have been reports of fraudulent or counterfeit permits being issued adjacent to the vehicle import permit office in Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juarez and other border areas.

**Dual Nationality:** Mexican law recognizes [dual nationality](#) for Mexicans by birth, meaning those born in Mexico or born abroad to Mexican parents. U.S. citizens who are also Mexican nationals are considered by local authorities to be Mexican. Dual nationality status could result in the delay of notification of arrests and other emergencies or hamper U.S. Government efforts to provide consular services. Dual nationals are subject to compulsory military service in Mexico; in addition, dual national males must register for the U.S. Selective Service upon turning 18. For more information, [visit the U.S. Selective Service website](#). Travelers possessing both U.S. and Mexican nationalities must carry with them proof of citizenship of both countries. Under Mexican law, dual nationals entering or departing Mexico must identify themselves as Mexican. Under U.S. law, dual nationals entering the United States must identify themselves as U.S. citizens.

**Customs Regulations:** Please refer to our information on [customs regulations](#). U.S. citizens bringing gifts to friends and relatives in Mexico should be prepared to demonstrate to Mexican customs officials the origin and value of the gifts. U.S. citizens entering Mexico by land borders can bring in gifts with a value of up to \$75.00 duty-free, except for alcohol and tobacco products. U.S. citizens entering Mexico by air or sea can bring in gifts with a value of up to \$300.00 duty-free. Please refer to Mexico's customs [guide for passengers](#) for more information, including on requirements to declare cash or other financial instruments exceeding the equivalent of \$3000 U.S. dollars.

**Personal Effects:** Tourists are allowed to bring in their personal effects duty-free. According to [customs regulations](#), in addition to clothing, personal effects may include one camera, one video cassette player, one personal computer, one CD player, 5 DVDs, 20 music CDs or audiocassettes, 12 rolls of unused film, and one cellular phone. Any tourist carrying such items, even if duty-free, should enter the "Merchandise to Declare" lane at the first customs checkpoint. Travelers should be prepared to pay any assessed duty on items in excess of these allowances. Failure to declare personal effects may result in the seizure of the items as contraband, plus the seizure of any vehicle in which the goods were transported for attempted smuggling. Recovery of the seized vehicle may involve payment of substantial fines and attorney's fees. See also the "Firearms Penalties" section below regarding Mexico's strict laws and penalties regarding import of firearms or ammunition.

**Temporary Imports/Exports:** Mexican customs authorities enforce strict regulations concerning temporary importation into or exportation from Mexico of items such as trucks and autos, trailers, antiquities, medications, medical equipment, business equipment, etc. Prior to traveling, contact the Mexican Embassy or one of the Mexican consulates in the United States for specific information regarding customs requirements.

**Donations of Goods:** U.S. citizens traveling to Mexico with goods intended for donation within Mexico, or traveling through Mexico with goods intended for donation in another country,



should be aware of Mexican Customs regulations prohibiting importation of used clothing, textiles, and other used goods into Mexico, even as charitable donations. The importation of all medicines and medical equipment for donation to charity must be approved by Mexican Customs in advance; failure to obtain the proper import permits will result in the confiscation of the medical supplies. Expired medications may not be imported for donation under any circumstances. Individuals or groups wishing to make charitable donations should check with Mexican Customs for the list of prohibited items, and should hire an experienced customs broker in the U.S. to ensure compliance with Mexican law. The charitable individual or group, not the customs broker, will be held responsible for large fines or confiscation of goods if the documentation is incorrect. For further information, visit the [website for Mexican Customs \(Aduanas\)](#).

Mexican authorities require that all international transit through Mexico of persons and merchandise destined for Central or South America be handled only at the Los Indios Bridge located south of Harlingen, Texas on Route 509. [The U.S. Consulate General in Matamoros](#) is the nearest consulate to Los Indios Bridge and may be contacted for up-to-date information by calling 011-52-868-812-4402, ext. 273 or 280, or by checking their website, which lists in English the most common items prohibited from entry into Mexico. Additional customs information can be found on the [U.S. Customs and Border Protection website](#).

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**THREATS TO SAFETY AND SECURITY:** All travelers to Mexico should review the Department of State's [Travel Warning for Mexico](#) that provides detailed information about security issues affecting parts of the country. Millions of U.S. citizens visit Mexico safely each year. However, crime and violence, much of it fueled by transnational criminal activity, affect many parts of the country, including both urban and rural areas. Visitors should remain alert and be aware of their surroundings at all times, particularly when visiting the border region. In its efforts to combat violence, the Government of Mexico has deployed federal police and military troops to various parts of the country. Government checkpoints, often staffed by military personnel, have been erected in many parts of the country, especially, but not exclusively, in the border area. U.S. citizens are advised to cooperate with personnel at government checkpoints when traveling on Mexican highways.

Stay up to date by:

- Bookmarking our [Bureau of Consular Affairs website](#), which contains the current [Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts](#) as well as the [Worldwide Caution](#).
- Following us on [Twitter](#) and the Bureau of Consular Affairs page on [Facebook](#) as well.
- Downloading our free [Smart Traveler iPhone App](#) to have travel information at your fingertips.
- Calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free within the U.S. and Canada, or by calling a regular toll line, 1-202-501-4444, from other countries.
- Taking time before you travel to improve your personal security. Here are some useful tips for [traveling safely abroad](#).

**Demonstrations:** The Mexican Constitution prohibits political activities by foreigners; such actions may result in detention and/or deportation. Travelers should avoid political

demonstrations and other activities that might be deemed political by the Mexican authorities. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate into violence. Demonstrators in Mexico may block traffic on roads, including major arteries, or take control of toll booths on highways. U.S. citizens are urged to avoid areas of demonstrations, and to exercise caution if in the vicinity of any protests.

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**CRIME:** Crime in Mexico continues to occur at a high rate and can often be violent. Street crime, ranging from pick pocketing to armed robbery, is a serious problem in most major cities. Carjackings are also common, particularly in certain areas (see the [Travel Warning for Mexico](#) ). The homicide rates in parts of Mexico have risen sharply in recent years, driven largely by violence associated with transnational criminal organizations. Ciudad Juarez and other cities along Mexico's northern border have particularly high murder rates. The Mexican government makes a considerable effort to protect U.S. citizens and other visitors traveling to major tourist destinations. Resort areas and tourist destinations in Mexico generally do not see the levels of violence and crime reported in the border region and in areas along major trafficking routes. Nevertheless, crime and violence are serious problems. While most victims of violence are Mexican citizens associated with criminal activity, the security situation poses serious risks for U.S. citizens as well. U.S. citizen victims of crime in Mexico are encouraged to report incidents to the nearest police headquarters and to the nearest U.S. consular office.

The Government of Mexico has taken significant steps to strengthen its law enforcement capabilities at the federal level, which have begun putting organized criminal networks on the defensive. However, state and local police forces continue to suffer from lack of training and funding, and are a weak deterrent to criminals acting on behalf of organized crime and armed with an impressive array of weapons. In some areas, municipal police forces are widely suspected of colluding with organized crime. In others, police officers are specifically targeted by members of transnational criminal organizations. Because of the dangerous situation in which police officers operate, all travelers are advised to take a nonthreatening posture when interacting with police and to cooperate with police instructions. We further advise travelers to avoid any areas where law enforcement operations are being carried out. Significant justice reforms are underway in certain Mexican states, as well as at the federal level; however, judicial systems are often overworked, under resourced, and inefficient.

**Pirated Merchandise:** Counterfeit and pirated goods are widely available in Mexico. Their sale is largely controlled by organized crime. Purchase for personal use is not criminalized in Mexico; however, bringing these goods back to the United States may result in forfeitures and/or fines.

**Personal Property:** Travelers should always leave valuables and irreplaceable items in a safe place, or avoid bringing them at all. All visitors are encouraged to make use of hotel safes when available, avoid wearing obviously expensive jewelry or designer clothing, and carry only the cash or credit cards that will be needed on each outing. There have been significant numbers of incidents of pick pocketing, purse snatching, and hotel-room theft. Public transportation is a particularly popular place for pickpockets. When renting a vehicle, ensure that advertisements or labels for the rental agency are not prominently displayed on the vehicle.

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Avoid leaving valuables such as identification, passport, and irreplaceable property in rental vehicles, even when locked. Some travelers have had their passports stolen from their bags within the airport, particularly during peak travel seasons. Remember to secure your passport within a zipper pocket or other safe enclosure so that it cannot be easily removed. Be vigilant of your passport even after passing through security and while waiting in a departure lounge to board your flight.

Business travelers should be aware that theft can occur even in apparently secure locations. Theft of items such as briefcases and laptops occur frequently at Mexico City's Benito Juarez International Airport and at business-class hotels. Passengers arriving at Mexican airports who need to obtain pesos should use the exchange counters or ATMs in the arrival/departure gate area, where access is restricted, rather than changing money after passing through Customs, where they can be observed by criminals. A number of U.S. citizens have been arrested for passing on counterfeit currency they had earlier received in change. If you receive what you believe to be a counterfeit bank note, bring it to the attention of Mexican law enforcement.

**Personal Safety:** Visitors should be aware of their surroundings at all times, even when in areas generally considered safe. Women traveling alone are especially vulnerable and should exercise caution, particularly at night. Some U.S. Citizens have reported being raped, robbed of personal property, or abducted and then held while their credit cards were used at various businesses or Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs). Individuals who have been targeted were often walking alone in isolated locations. Be very cautious in general when using ATMs in Mexico. If you must use an ATM, it should be accessed only during the business day at large protected facilities (preferably inside commercial establishments, rather than at glass-enclosed, highly visible ATMs on streets). Travelers to remote or isolated hunting or fishing venues should be aware that they may be some distance from ATMs, appropriate medical services, and law enforcement or consular assistance in an emergency.

**Kidnapping:** Kidnapping, including the kidnapping of non-Mexicans, continues to occur. So-called express kidnappings, i.e., attempts to get quick cash in exchange for the release of an individual, have occurred in almost all of Mexico's large cities and appear to target not only the wealthy but also the middle class. Review the sections above on personal property and personal safety for common sense actions you can take to reduce the risk of becoming a victim.

A common scam throughout Mexico is 'virtual' kidnapping by telephone, in which the callers typically speak in a distraught voice in a ploy to elicit information about a potential victim and then use this knowledge to demand ransom for the release of the supposed victim. Information that can be used against victims may also be obtained from social networking websites. Calls are often placed by prison inmates using smuggled cellular phones. In the event of such a call, it is important to stay calm, as the vast majority of these calls are hoaxes. Do not reveal any personal information and try to speak with the victim to corroborate his/her identity. Any kidnapping, real or virtual, should be reported to the police as well as to the Embassy or nearest consulate.

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**Credit/Debit Card "Skimming":** Exercise caution when utilizing credit or debit cards in ATM

machines or dubious locales. There have been reports of instances in which U.S. citizens in Mexico have had their card numbers "skimmed" and the money in their debit accounts stolen or their credit cards fraudulently charged. ("Skimming" is the theft of credit card information by an employee of a legitimate merchant or bank, manually copying down numbers or using a magnetic stripe reader, or using a camera and skimmer installed in an ATM machine.) In addition to skimming, the risk of physical theft of credit or debit cards also exists. To prevent such theft, the Embassy recommends that travelers keep close track of their personal belongings when out and about and that they only carry what they need. Most restaurants and other businesses will bring the credit card machine to your table so that you can keep the card in your possession at all times. If travelers choose to use credit cards, they should regularly check their account status to ensure its integrity.

**Buses and Public Transportation:** Whenever possible, visitors should travel by bus only during daylight hours and only by first-class conveyance. Although there have been several reports of bus hijackings and robberies on toll roads, buses on toll roads have experienced a markedly lower rate of incidents than buses (second- and third-class) that travel the less secure "free" highways. Although the police have made progress in bringing this type of crime under control, armed robberies of entire busloads of passengers still occur.

Metro (subway) robberies are frequent in Mexico City, especially during crowded rush hours. If riding the metro or the city bus system, U.S. citizens should take extreme care with valuables and belongings.

**Taxis:** Robberies and assaults on passengers in "libre" taxis (that is, taxis not affiliated with a taxi stand) are frequent and violent in Mexico, with passengers subjected to beating, shooting, and sexual assault. U.S. citizens visiting Mexico should avoid taking any taxi not summoned by telephone or contacted in advance. When in need of a taxi, telephone a radio taxi or "sitio" (regulated taxi stand – pronounced "C-T-O"), and ask the dispatcher for the driver's name and the taxi's license plate number. Ask the hotel concierge or other responsible individual to write down the license plate number of the cab that you entered. Avoid "libre" taxis and the Volkswagen beetle taxis altogether. Although "libre" taxis are more convenient and less expensive, these are not as well regulated, may be unregistered, and are potentially more dangerous. U.S. Embassy employees in Mexico City are prohibited from using "libre" taxis, or any taxis hailed on the street, and are authorized to use only "sitio" taxis.

Passengers arriving at any airport in Mexico should take only authorized airport taxis after pre-paying the fare at one of the special booths inside the airport.

**Harassment/Extortion:** In some instances, U.S. citizens have become victims of harassment, mistreatment and extortion by alleged Mexican law enforcement and other officials. Mexican authorities have cooperated in investigating such cases, but one must have the officer's name, badge number, and patrol car number to pursue a complaint effectively. Please note this information if you ever have a problem with police or other officials. In addition, tourists should be wary of persons representing themselves as police officers or other officials. When in doubt, ask for identification. Be aware that offering a bribe to a public official to avoid a ticket or other penalty is a crime in Mexico.

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One of the latest extortion techniques, known as the " [grandparent scam](#) ", involves calls placed by persons alleging to be attorneys or U.S. Government employees claiming that a person's relative – nearly always a purported grandchild - has been in a car accident in Mexico and has been arrested/detained. The caller asks for a large sum of money to ensure the subject's release. When the recipient of the call checks on their family member, they discover that the entire story is false. If the alleged detainee cannot be located in the U.S. and the family has reason to believe that the person did, in fact, travel to Mexico, contact the U.S. Embassy or nearest U.S. Consulate for assistance in determining if they have been detained by authorities. Further information on international financial scams is available on our [website](#).

Beware of possible scams involving inflated prices for tourist-related goods and services and avoid patronizing restaurants and other service providers that do not have clearly listed prices. You should check with your hotel for the names of reputable establishments and service providers in the area.

**Sexual Assault:** Rape and sexual assault continue to be serious problems in resort areas. Many of these incidents occur at night or during the early morning hours, in hotel rooms, or on deserted beaches. Acquaintance rape is a serious problem. Hotel workers, taxi drivers, and security personnel have been implicated in many cases. Women should avoid being alone, particularly in isolated areas and at night. It is imperative that victims file a police report, which should include a rape "kit" exam, against the perpetrator(s) as soon as possible at the nearest police station. There have been several cases where the victim traveled back to the U.S. without filing a police report or submitting to a rape exam; their attempts to document their case later on did not carry weight with local Mexican authorities.

Some bars and nightclubs, especially in resort cities such as Cancun, Acapulco, Mazatlan, Cabo San Lucas, and Tijuana, can be havens for drug dealers and petty criminals. Interaction with such individuals may put a traveler at risk. There have been instances of contamination or drugging of drinks to gain control over the patron.

See the information under "Special Circumstances" below regarding [Spring Break in Mexico](#) if you are considering visiting Mexican resort areas during February through April, when thousands of U.S. college students traditionally arrive in those areas. Additional [information designed specifically for traveling students](#) is also available on our Students Abroad website.

**Transnational Crime in Mexico:** Since 2006, the Mexican government has engaged in an extensive effort to combat transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). Mexican TCOs, meanwhile, have been engaged in a vicious struggle to control trafficking routes and other criminal activity. According to the most recent homicide figures published by the Mexican government, 47,515 people were killed in narcotics-related violence in Mexico between December 1, 2006 and September 30, 2011, with 12,903 narcotics-related homicides in the first nine months of 2011 alone. While most of those killed in narcotics-related violence have been members of TCOs, innocent persons have also been killed. The number of U.S. citizens reported to the Department of State as murdered in Mexico increased from 35 in 2007 to 113 in 2011.

Recent violent attacks and persistent security concerns have prompted the U.S. Embassy to

urge U.S. citizens to defer unnecessary travel to certain parts of Mexico, and to advise U.S. citizens residing or traveling in those areas to exercise extreme caution. For detailed information on these areas and the threats involved, please refer to the [Travel Warning for Mexico](#).

TCOs have increasingly targeted unsuspecting individuals who cross the border on a regular and predictable basis traveling between known destinations as a way to transport drugs to the U.S. They affix drugs to the undercarriage of the car while it is parked in Mexico. Once in the U.S., members of the organization will remove the packages while the vehicle is unattended. If you are a frequent border crosser, you should vary your routes and travel times as well as closely monitor your vehicle to avoid being targeted.

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**VICTIMS OF CRIME:** If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime abroad, you should contact the local police and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate (see the [Department of State's list of embassies and consulates](#) ). Do not rely on hotel/restaurant/tour company management to make the report for you. We can:

- Replace a stolen passport. The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate.
- Help you find appropriate medical care if you are the victim of violent crimes such as assault or rape.
- Put you in contact with the appropriate police authorities, and if you want us to, we can contact family members or friends.
- Help you understand the local criminal justice process and direct you to local attorneys, although it is important to remember that local authorities are responsible for investigating and prosecuting the crime. Under the best of circumstances, prosecution is very difficult (a fact some assailants appear to exploit knowingly), but no criminal investigation is possible without a formal complaint to Mexican authorities.

The local equivalent to the "911" emergency line in Mexico is "066". Although there may be English-speaking operators available, to avoid delay it is best to seek the assistance of a Spanish speaker to place the call.

Please see our information on [Victims of Crime](#), including possible victim compensation programs in the United States.

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**CRIMINAL PENALTIES:** While in a foreign country, an individual is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which can differ significantly from those in the United States. and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. The trial process in Mexico is different from that in the United States, and procedures may vary from state to state. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses. Persons violating Mexican laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use or trafficking in illegal drugs in Mexico are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. If you break local laws

in Mexico, your U.S. passport will not help you avoid arrest or prosecution. It is very important to know what is legal and what is illegal wherever you go.

**Sexual Crimes:** Sexual exploitation of children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a [crime prosecutable in the United States](#). Soliciting sexual services of a minor is illegal in Mexico, and is punishable by imprisonment. The Mexican government has announced an aggressive program to discourage sexual tourism. Police authorities in the state of Baja California recently began enforcement of anti-pedophile legislation.

**Arrests and Notifications:** The Mexican government is required by international law to notify the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. consulate promptly when a U.S. citizen is arrested, if the arrestee so requests. In practice, however, depending on where the arrest takes place, this notification can be months late, or may never occur at all, limiting the assistance the U.S. Government can provide. U.S. citizens should promptly identify themselves as such to the arresting officers, and should request that the Embassy or nearest consulate be notified immediately. Also see the "grandparent scam," described above in the Harrassment/Extorsion section, in which a U.S. citizen is alleged to be detained by authorities in Mexico in attempt to get relatives in the United States to wire money. Confirm an alleged detention or arrest with the Embassy or consulate before taking any other action.

**Prison Facilities:** Prison conditions in Mexico can be extremely poor. In many facilities food is insufficient in both quantity and quality, and prisoners must pay for adequate nutrition from their own funds. Many Mexican prisons provide poor medical care, and prisoners with urgent medical conditions may receive only a minimum of attention. U.S. citizens who are incarcerated in Mexico are sometimes forced to pay hundreds and even thousands of dollars in "protection money" to fellow prisoners. From 2008 through 2011, 30 U.S. citizen deaths in Mexican prisons have been reported, including at least 13 apparent homicides.

**Prisoner Treatment/Interrogations:** Mexico is party to several international anti-torture conventions, and the Mexican Constitution and Mexican law accordingly prohibit torture; however, in its annual report, Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights documents cases of Mexican security forces seeking to obtain information through torture. Convictions for torture or for any alleged abuses by security forces are rare. U.S. citizens have reported being beaten, raped, and subjected to severe interrogation techniques while in the custody of Mexican security forces.

**Drug Penalties and Prescription Medications:** Penalties for drug offenses are strict, and convicted offenders can expect large fines and jail sentences of up to 25 years. The purchase of controlled medications requires a prescription from a licensed Mexican physician. Some Mexican doctors have been arrested for writing prescriptions without due cause. In those instances, U.S. citizens who purchased the medications have been held in jail for months waiting for the Mexican judicial system to make a decision on their case. Marijuana prescriptions (or "medical marijuana") are not valid in Mexico. Individuals in possession of a state medical marijuana license should remember that the license is not valid outside of the borders of that state, and bringing marijuana into Mexico – even if it is accompanied by a prescription – is considered international drug trafficking, a serious federal offense. The

Mexican list of controlled medications differs from that of the United States, and Mexican public health laws concerning controlled medications are unclear and often enforced selectively. To determine whether a particular medication is controlled in Mexico or requires a prescription from a Mexican doctor for purchase, please consult the website of the [Mexican Federal Commission for Protection against Health Risks](#) (Comisión Federal para la Protección contra Riesgos Sanitarios - COFEPRIS).

The U.S. Embassy cautions that possession of any amount of prescription medication brought from the United States, including medications to treat HIV, and psychotropic drugs such as Valium, can result in arrest if Mexican authorities suspect abuse, or if the quantity of the prescription medication exceeds the amount required for several days' use. Individuals are advised to carry a copy of the prescription. If significant quantities of the medication are required, individuals should carry a doctor's letter explaining that the quantity of medication is appropriate for their personal medical use.

**Buying Prescription Drugs:** Any drug classified as a controlled medicine, including antibiotics, by the government of Mexico cannot be purchased in Mexico without a Mexican prescription. This prescription must be written by a physician who is federally registered in Mexico. Purchasing a controlled medicine without a valid prescription in Mexico is a serious crime for both the purchaser and the seller. Purchasing a controlled medicine with a U.S. prescription is not sufficient and is illegal, regardless of what the Mexican pharmacy may be willing to sell to the purchaser. By law, Mexican pharmacies cannot honor foreign prescriptions. U.S. citizens have been arrested and their medicines confiscated by Mexican authorities when their prescriptions were written by a licensed U.S. physician and filled by a licensed Mexican pharmacist. There have been cases of U.S. citizens buying prescription drugs in border cities only to be arrested soon after or have money extorted by criminals impersonating police officers. Those arrested are often held for the full 48 hours allowed by Mexican law without charges being filed, then released. During this interval, the detainees are often asked for bribes or are solicited by attorneys who demand large fees to secure their release, which will normally occur without any intercession as there are insufficient grounds to bring criminal charges against the individuals. In addition, U.S. law enforcement officials believe that as many as 25 percent of the medications available in Mexico are counterfeit and substandard. Such counterfeit medications may be difficult to distinguish from the real medications and could pose serious health risks to consumers. The importation of prescription drugs into the United States can be illegal in certain circumstances. U.S. law generally permits persons to enter the United States with only an immediate supply (i.e., enough for about one month) of a prescription medication.

**Criminal Penalties for Possession:** Mexico has new laws that have been touted by the press as making the possession of drugs for personal use legal. Many of the allowable amounts are much less than what has been reported by the news media. Additionally, the new drug laws include stiffer penalties for many drug offenses, and the sale and distribution of drugs continues to be illegal in Mexico. U.S. citizens traveling to Mexico should [review this information](#) to avoid possible prosecution under Mexican law.

**Importing Medicines into Mexico:** Medications for personal use are not subject to duty when



hand-carried into Mexico. Individuals are advised to carry a copy of their prescriptions in the event they are asked to prove that the medicines are for personal use. To ship (import) prescription medication into Mexico for personal use, a foreigner must obtain a permit from the Mexican Health Department prior to importing the medicine into Mexico. For a fee, a customs broker can process the permit before the Mexican authorities on behalf of an individual. If using the services of a customs broker, it is advisable to agree upon the fees before telling the broker to proceed. Current listings of local customs brokers (agencias aduanales) are available in the Mexico City yellow pages.

**Firearms Penalties:** Illegal firearms trafficking from the United States into Mexico is a major problem. The Department of State warns all U.S. citizens against taking any type of firearm or ammunition into Mexico. Entering Mexico with a firearm, certain types of knives, or even a single round of ammunition is illegal, even if the weapon or ammunition is taken into Mexico unintentionally. The Mexican government strictly enforces laws restricting the entry of firearms and ammunition along all land borders and at airports and seaports, and routinely x-rays all incoming luggage. U.S. citizens entering Mexico with a weapon or ammunition (including a small number of bullets), even accidentally, generally are detained for at least a few days, and violations by U.S. citizens have resulted in arrests, convictions, and long prison sentences. Travelers are strongly advised to thoroughly inspect all belongings prior to travel to Mexico to avoid the accidental import of ammunition or firearms. For more information visit the websites for the [Mexican Secretary of Defense](#) and [Mexican Customs](#).

Vessels entering Mexican waters with firearms or ammunition on board must have a permit previously issued by the Mexican Embassy or a Mexican consulate. Mariners do not avoid prosecution by declaring their weapons at the port of entry. Before traveling, mariners who have obtained a Mexican firearm permit should contact Mexican port officials to receive guidance on the specific procedures used to report and secure weapons and ammunition.

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**SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:** Weather conditions in Mexico vary as they do in various parts of the United States. From June to November, the country may experience strong winds and rains as a result of hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico or along the Pacific Coast. Some areas may experience earthquakes. It is prudent to leave a detailed itinerary, including local contact information and expected time and date of return, with a friend or family member, as well as [sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#).

**Water Sports:** Visitors to Mexico, including to local resort areas, should carefully assess the potential risk of recreational activities. Recreational facilities such as pools may not meet U.S. safety or sanitation standards. Swimming pool drain systems may not comply with U.S. safety standards and swimmers should exercise caution. Several U.S. citizens have died in hotel pools in recent years. Do not swim in pools or at beaches without lifeguards. Parents should watch minor children closely when they are in or around water. U.S. citizens have drowned or disappeared at both remote and popular beaches along the Mexican coasts.

Warning flags on beaches should be taken seriously. If black flags are up, do not enter the

water. In Cancun, there is often a very strong undertow along the beach from the Hyatt Regency all the way south to Club Med. Several drowning and near-drowning incidents have been reported on the east coast of Cozumel, particularly in the Playa San Martin-Chen Rio area. In Acapulco, avoid swimming outside the bay area. Several U.S. citizens have died while swimming in rough surf at the Revolcadero Beach near Acapulco. Despite the presence of U.S.-trained lifeguards, several U.S. citizens have drowned in the area of Zipolite Beach in Puerto Angel, Oaxaca, because of sudden waves and strong currents. Beaches on the Pacific side of the Baja California peninsula at Cabo San Lucas can be dangerous due to rip tides and rogue waves; hazardous beaches in this area are clearly marked in English and Spanish. Even people simply walking along the beaches have been washed into the ocean by rogue waves. Encounters with sharks have occurred all along Mexico's coastline, particularly in the Gulf of Mexico near Veracruz and Cancun and along the Pacific Ocean coast, including near Ixtapa. Surfers and other water sports enthusiasts should always inquire about local conditions before going into the water. Do not swim alone in isolated beach areas. Beaches may not be well-marked, and strong currents could lead to dangerous conditions for even the most experienced swimmers. Do not dive into unknown bodies of water, because hidden rocks or shallow depths can cause serious injury or death.

Rented sports and aquatic equipment may not meet U.S. safety standards or be covered by any accident insurance. Scuba diving equipment may be substandard or defective due to frequent use. Inexperienced scuba divers in particular should beware of dive shops that promise to "certify" you after only a few hours' instruction. There are several hospitals and medical centers with hyperbaric decompression chambers to treat the effects of nitrogen narcosis (commonly referred to as the "bends") in Mexico. These tend to be in large cities and near tourist destinations where scuba diving is common, such as the Yucatan Peninsula. Please note you will be expected to pay for service up front and likely in cash. Parasailing has killed U.S. citizen tourists who were dragged through palm trees or were slammed into buildings. U.S. citizen tourists have also been killed in jet-ski accidents, especially in group outings when inexperienced guides allowed clients to follow each other too closely. Accidents involving breaking zip-lines have also occurred.

Boats used for excursions may not carry adequate life jackets, radios, or tools to make repairs in the event of engine failure and may not be covered by accident insurance. Mariners preparing to depart from a Mexican harbor should visit the harbormaster and leave a detailed trip plan, including intended destination and crew and passenger information.

**Resort Areas and Spring Break:** Over 3 million U.S. citizens travel to Cancun and other Mexican beach resorts each year, including as many as 120,000 during "spring break" season, which normally begins in mid-February and runs for about two months. Excessive alcohol consumption, especially by U.S. citizens under the legal U.S. drinking age, is a significant problem. The legal drinking age in Mexico is 18, but it is not uniformly enforced. Alcohol is implicated in the majority of arrests, violent crimes, accidents and deaths suffered by U.S. citizen tourists. See also the section above entitled "Sexual Assault."

**Mountain Climbing and Hiking:** Travelers who wish to climb Pico de Orizaba in Veracruz should be aware that summer droughts in recent years have reduced much of the snow coating and

turned the Jamapa Glacier into a high-speed ice chute, increasing the risk of death or serious injury. At least 17 climbers have died on the mountain and 39 have been injured in recent years, including U.S. citizens. Rescue teams operate without the benefit of sophisticated equipment. Any medical treatment provided in local hospitals or clinics must be paid in cash. While regulation of the ascent is minimal and guides are not required, the U.S. Embassy recommends hiring an experienced guide.

The Popocatepetl Volcano, located 40 miles southeast of Mexico City, and the Colima Volcano, located approximately 20 miles north-northeast of Colima city in the state of Colima on the southwestern coast, are two of the most active volcanoes in Mexico. Remain within the designated tourist area and observe all safety recommendations from the Mexican Proteccion Civil that monitors the conditions of the volcano. Ash omitted from the volcano can disrupt air travel.

When departing on an outing to backcountry areas to hike or climb, it is prudent to leave a detailed itinerary, including route information and expected time and date of return, with your hotel clerk or a friend or family member.

**Marriage and Divorce Requirements in Mexico:** In general, to marry a Mexican national in Mexico, a U.S. citizen must be physically present in Mexico and present documents required by the jurisdiction where the marriage will take place. U.S. citizens who marry U.S. citizens or other non-Mexicans are not subject to a residence requirement, but are required to present their tourist cards. For additional information on marriages in Mexico, contact the Mexican Embassy or nearest Mexican consulate in the United States. Divorce requirements may vary according to jurisdiction. The U.S. Embassy recommends that U.S. citizens consult an attorney and/or the Mexican Embassy or nearest Mexican consulate for information on divorces in Mexico.

**Real Estate and Time Shares:** You should be aware of the risks inherent in purchasing real estate in Mexico, and should exercise extreme caution before entering into any form of commitment to invest in property there. Mexican law and practice regarding real estate differ substantially from the United States. Foreigners who purchase property in Mexico may find that property disputes with Mexican citizens may not be treated evenhandedly by Mexican criminal justice authorities and in the courts. Consumers should consult a Mexican attorney before undertaking a real estate transaction.

U.S. citizens should exercise caution when considering time-share investments and be aware of the aggressive tactics used by some time-share sales representatives. Buyers should be fully informed and take sufficient time to consider their decisions before signing time-share contracts, ideally after consulting an independent attorney. Mexican law allows time-share purchasers five days to cancel the contract for unconditional and full reimbursement. U.S. citizens should never sign a contract that includes clauses penalizing a buyer who cancels within five days. Note that time-share companies cannot be sued in U.S. courts unless they have an office or other business presence in the U.S. The Department of State and the U.S. Embassy frequently receive complaints from U.S. citizens about extremely aggressive sales tactics, exaggerated claims of return on investment, lack of customer service, and questionable business practices by time-share companies, resulting in substantial financial losses for time-

share investors.

A formal complaint against any merchant should be filed with PROFECO, Mexico's federal consumer protection agency. PROFECO has the power to mediate disputes, investigate consumer complaints, order hearings, levy fines and sanctions for not appearing at hearings, and do price-check inspections of merchants. [All complaints by U.S. citizens](#) are handled by PROFECO's English-speaking office in Mexico City at 011-52-55-5211-1723 (phone), 011-52-55-5211-2052 (fax), or via email at the link above. For more information, please see the [PROFECO](#) website.

**Ownership Restrictions:** The Mexican Constitution prohibits direct ownership by foreigners of real estate within 100 kilometers (about 62 miles) of any border, and within 50 kilometers (about 31 miles) of any coastline. In order to permit foreign investment in these areas, the Mexican government has created a trust mechanism in which a bank has title to the property but a trust beneficiary enjoys the benefits of ownership. However, U.S. citizens are vulnerable to title challenges that may result in years of litigation and possible eviction and even incarceration. Although title insurance is available in the Baja Peninsula and in other parts of Mexico, it is virtually unknown and remains untested in most of the country. In addition, Mexican law recognizes squatters' rights, and homeowners can spend thousands of dollars in legal fees and years of frustration in trying to remove squatters who occupy their property.

**Labor Laws:** U.S. citizen property owners should consult legal counsel or local authorities before hiring employees to serve in their homes or on their vessels moored in Mexico. Several U.S. citizen property owners have faced lengthy lawsuits for failure to comply with Mexican labor laws regarding severance pay and Mexican social security benefits.

**Human Smuggling and Trafficking:** Mexican authorities may prosecute anyone arrested for trafficking or smuggling of people into or out of Mexico in addition to any charges they may face in the other country involved, including the United States.

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**MEDICAL FACILITIES AND HEALTH INFORMATION:** Adequate medical care can be found in major cities. Excellent health facilities are available in Mexico City, but training and availability of emergency responders may be below U.S. standards. Care in more remote areas is limited. Standards of medical training, patient care and business practices vary greatly among medical facilities in beach resorts throughout Mexico. In recent years, some U.S. citizens have complained that certain health-care facilities in beach resorts have taken advantage of them by overcharging or providing unnecessary medical care. A significant number of complaints have been lodged against some of the private hospitals in the Cabo San Lucas area, including complaints about price gouging and various unlawful and/or unethical pricing schemes and collection measures. Additionally, U.S. citizens should be aware that many Mexican facilities require payment 'up front' prior to performing a procedure. Hospitals in Mexico do not accept U.S. domestic health insurance or Medicare/Medicaid and will expect payment via cash, credit, debit card or bank transfer. Elective medical procedures may be less expensive than in the United States, but providers may not adhere to U.S. standards. Additionally, visitors are cautioned that facilities may lack access to sufficient emergency support. The U.S. Embassy

encourages visitors to obtain as much information about the facility and the medical personnel as possible when considering surgical or other procedures, and when possible patients should travel with a family member or another responsible party.

In addition to other publicly available information, U.S. citizens may consult the U.S. Embassy's website for a [list of doctors](#) and a [list of hospitals](#) in Mexico City or contact the U.S. Embassy, U.S. consulate, or consular agency prior to seeking non-emergency medical attention. The U.S. consulates and consular agencies also maintain lists of reputable doctors and medical facilities that are available to assist U.S. citizens in need of medical care. Before beginning international travel, U.S. citizens may wish to obtain emergency medical evacuation insurance, check with their health care providers to see if the cost for medical treatment outside the U.S. is covered, and inquire about the reimbursement process.

**Procedures after the Death of a U.S. Citizen in Mexico:** When a United States citizen dies in Mexico, it is critical that the next of kin act promptly to contract with a Mexican funeral home to help carry out funeral arrangements, including return of the deceased's remains to the U.S., if desired. The next of kin must also provide documents establishing the identity of both the next of kin and the decedent. Common documents used for this purpose are passports, government-issued photo identification such as a driver's license, birth certificates and marriage certificates. The next of kin is responsible for all costs associated with the funeral home, and/or shipment of remains or personal effects.

The Embassy or Consulate in the district where the U.S. citizen died can provide a list of funeral homes and location-specific requirements in the [Consular District](#). Although Embassy staff members may not make funeral and other arrangements, staff can help locate and notify the next of kin of their loved one's passing, inform families about the Mexican legal requirements for claiming a loved one's remains, and assist in shipping personal effects to the United States. The U.S. Embassy and its Consulates also prepare a Consular Report of Death of a U.S. Citizen Abroad, based on the local Mexican death certificate. The Consular Report of Death Abroad may be used in most legal proceedings in the United States as proof of death overseas. To prepare this document, Embassy staff will need original evidence of U.S. citizenship of the decedent and the original Mexican death certificate.

**Water Quality:** In many areas in Mexico, tap water is unsafe and should be avoided. Bottled water and beverages are safe, although, visitors should be aware that many restaurants and hotels serve tap water unless bottled water is specifically requested. Ice may also come from tap water and should be avoided. Visitors should exercise caution when buying food or beverages from street vendors.

The quality of water along some beaches in or near Acapulco or other large coastal communities may be unsafe for swimming because of contamination. Swimming in contaminated water may cause diarrhea and/or other illnesses. Mexican government agencies monitor water quality in public beach areas but their standards and sampling techniques may differ from those in the United States.

**Altitude:** In high-altitude areas such as Mexico City (elevation 7,600 feet or about 1/2 mile higher than Denver, Colorado), most people need a short adjustment period. Symptoms of

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reaction to high altitude include a lack of energy, shortness of breath, occasional dizziness, headache, and insomnia. Those with heart problems should consult their doctor before traveling. Air pollution in Mexico City and Guadalajara is severe, especially from December to May, and combined with high altitude could affect travelers with underlying respiratory problems.

**Other Health Issues:** Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or via the [CDC's website](#). For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad consult the [World Health Organization's \(WHO\) website](#). Further health information for travelers is available from the [WHO](#).

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**MEDICAL INSURANCE:** The Department of State strongly urges U.S. citizens to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. Please see our information on [medical insurance overseas](#).

[Medicare coverage outside of the United States](#) is very limited and in nearly all situations does not provide coverage for hospital or medical costs in Mexico. The Veterans Affairs health care program only reimburses registrants in the [Foreign Medical Program](#) for eligible health care costs in Mexico.

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**TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS:** Continued concerns regarding criminal activity on highways along the Mexican border (which includes placement of illegal checkpoints and the murder of persons who did not stop and/or surrender their vehicles) have prompted the U.S. Mission in Mexico to impose certain restrictions on U.S. government employees transiting the area. Effective July 15, 2010, Mission employees and their families may not travel by vehicle across the U.S.-Mexico border to or from any post in the interior of Mexico. This policy also applies to employees and their families transiting Mexico to and from Central American posts. This policy does not apply to employees and their family members assigned to border posts (Tijuana, Nogales, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros), although they may not drive to interior posts as outlined above. Travel is permitted between Hermosillo and Nogales, but not permitted from Hermosillo to any other interior posts.

While in a foreign country, U.S. citizens may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The information below concerning Mexico is provided for general reference only, and may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance. Public transportation vehicles, specifically taxis and city buses, often do not comply with traffic regulations, including observing speed limits and stopping at red lights.

**Driving and Vehicle Regulations:** U.S. driver's licenses are valid in Mexico. Mexican law requires that only owners drive their vehicles, or that the owner be inside the vehicle. If not,

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the vehicle may be seized by Mexican customs and will not be returned under any circumstances. The Government of Mexico strictly regulates the entry of vehicles into Mexico. Traffic laws in Mexico are sporadically enforced and therefore often ignored by drivers, creating dangerous conditions for drivers and pedestrians. Driving under the influence of alcohol is illegal in all parts of Mexico. Using a mobile device (such as a cell phone) is also prohibited while driving in many parts of Mexico, including Mexico City, and violators may be fined.

**Insurance:** Mexican insurance is required for all vehicles, including rental vehicles. Mexican auto insurance is sold in most cities and towns on both sides of the border. U.S. automobile liability insurance is not valid in Mexico, nor is most collision and comprehensive coverage issued by U.S. companies. Motor vehicle insurance is considered invalid in Mexico if the driver is found to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

**Road Emergencies and Automobile Accidents:** Motor vehicle accidents are a leading cause of death of U.S. citizens in Mexico. Motorists should exercise caution and remain alert on all Mexican roads. If you have an emergency while driving, the equivalent of "911" in Mexico is "066", but this number is not always answered. If you are driving on a toll highway (or "cuota"), or any other major highway, you may contact the Green Angels (Angeles Verdes), a fleet of trucks with bilingual crews. The Green Angels may be reached directly at (01) (55) 5250-8221. If you are unable to call them, pull off to the side of the road and lift the hood of your car; chances are that they will find you.

If you are involved in an automobile accident, you may be taken into police custody until it can be determined who is liable and whether you have the ability to pay any penalty. If you do not have Mexican liability insurance, you may be prevented from departing the country even if you require life-saving medical care, and you are almost certain to spend some time in jail until all parties are satisfied that responsibility has been assigned and adequate financial satisfaction received. Drivers may face criminal charges if injuries or damages are serious.

**Road Safety:** Avoid driving on Mexican highways at night. Even multi-lane expressways in Mexico often have narrow lanes and steep shoulders. Single-vehicle rollover accidents involving U.S. citizens are common, often resulting in death or serious injury to vehicle occupants. Use extreme caution when approaching towns, driving on curves, and passing large trucks. All vehicle occupants should use seatbelts at all times. Criminal assaults have occurred on highways throughout Mexico; travelers should exercise extreme caution at all times and should use toll ("cuota") roads rather than the less secure "free" ("libre") roads whenever possible. Always keep car doors locked and windows up while driving, whether on the highway or in town. While in heavy traffic, or stopped in traffic, leave enough room between vehicles to maneuver and escape, if necessary. In addition, U.S. citizens should not hitchhike or accept rides from or offer rides to strangers anywhere in Mexico. Please refer to our [Road Safety Overseas](#) for more information.

[Vehicular traffic in Mexico City is restricted](#) in order to reduce air pollution. The restriction is based on the last digit of the vehicle license plate. This applies equally to permanent, temporary, and foreign (U.S.) plates. For additional information, refer to the [Hoy No Circula](#) website (Spanish only) maintained by the Mexico City government.

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In recent years, moped rentals have become very widespread in Cancun and Cozumel, and the number of serious moped accidents has risen accordingly. Most operators carry no insurance and do not conduct safety checks. The U.S. Embassy recommends avoiding operators who do not provide a helmet with the rental. Some operators have been known to demand fees many times in excess of damages caused to the vehicles, even if renters have purchased insurance in advance. Vacationers at other beach resorts have encountered similar problems after accidents involving rented jet-skis. There have been cases of mobs gathering to prevent tourists from departing the scene and to intimidate them into paying exorbitant damage claims.

For additional information in English concerning Mexican driver's permits, vehicle inspection, road tax, mandatory insurance, etc., please telephone the Mexican Secretariat of Tourism (SECTUR) at 1-800-44-MEXICO (639-426). Travelers can also consult [MexOnline](#) for further information regarding vehicle inspection and importation procedures. For detailed information in Spanish only, visit Mexican Customs' website [Importación Temporal de Vehículos](#) ("Temporary Importation of Vehicles"). Travelers are advised to consult with the Mexican Embassy or the nearest Mexican consulate in the United States for additional, detailed information prior to entering Mexico. For travel information for the Baja California peninsula, you can also consult independent websites [Travel to Baja](#) or [Discover Baja California](#).

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**AVIATION SAFETY OVERSIGHT:** The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the government of Mexico's Civil Aviation Authority as being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of Mexico's air carrier operations. Further information may be found on the [FAA safety assessment page](#).

**MARITIME SAFETY OVERSIGHT:** The Mexican maritime industry, including charter fishing and recreational vessels, is subject solely to Mexican safety regulations. Travelers should be aware that Mexican equipment and vessels may not meet U.S. safety standards or be covered by any accident insurance.

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**CHILDREN'S ISSUES:** Mexico is the destination country of the greatest number of children abducted from the United States by a parent. A party to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction since 1991, Mexico was found to be not compliant with the Convention in the Department of State's 2009 compliance report, though compliance improved in 2010. For information, see our Office of Children's Issues web pages on [intercountry adoption](#) and [international parental child abduction](#).

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This replaces the [Country Specific Information](#) dated November 14, 2011 to update the sections on Entry/Exit Requirements, Threats to Safety and Security, Crime, Criminal Penalties, Special Circumstances, Medical Facilities and Health Information, Medical Insurance, and Maritime Safety Oversight.

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